

Samson and his Uncontrolled Desire (Judges 13-16)

Aim: By the end of this lesson the teens should be able to

1. Differentiate between acceptable desires and sinful desires
2. Build up the spiritual controls which will lead them in the right track
3. Accept the fact that "abiding by the law of purity is possible"
4. Expect the reward of sin

Read: Judges 13-16

References:

- "Samson the Nazirite" By HG Bishop Youseff
(<http://www.suscopts.org/resources/literature/199/samson-the-nazirite/>)
- Talk on Samson By HG Bishop Youseff
(<http://www.suscopts.org/resources/audio/search/?q=samson>)

Memory Verse:

"O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may ...(Insert Your Request).....!" (Judges 16:28).

Introduction:

Samson was a great man and a great Judge. God entrusted him with many responsibilities in particular to lead the children of Israel at a critical time. But this great Judge had one desire that he could not discipline. This desire troubled him all his life and made him face many problems until his demeanour became ungodly.

God appeared to Samson's parents and told them that they would have a child, and this child would be a Nazirite. Therefore, Samson's parents before his birth, were given a revelation from God concerning his birth. Prior to this, his mother had been barren and did not have any children.

A Nazirite is one who is devoted to God. According to the customs of the Old Testament, Nazirite persons vow part of their lives, or their entire lives to God. Samson was a Nazirite from the womb of his mother. So he was not only consecrated for a certain period of his life, but he was consecrated all his life, even prior to conception, to God.

As a Nazirite, Samson had to honour three standards:

1- He could not drink wine, nor touch grapes.

Samson could not touch a dead body or any thing that was unclean, because as a Nazirite, he was totally consecrated to the Lord. Thus, he had to keep the purity of his

body as well as his spirit clean. During the 'Fraction' of the Divine Liturgy, we also conclude with, 'Purify our bodies, our souls and our spirits.'

2- He could not touch a dead body

The second point concerning the Nazirite was that he could not shave his hair. This of course would make him look different. Not shaving his hair had two connotations.

First he would appear different, so he would be recognized as a Nazirite.

Another point related to not shaving his hair was that he did not focus on his outward appearance. What he cared more for was the inward appearance. Unfortunately people waste a lot of time caring about their outside appearance.

With this lost time in mind, how much time do we spend reflecting on enriching our spirits and our souls? Unfortunately, many people care more about the beauty of their physical appearance than that of their souls. St. Peter in his First Letter said, "*For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves*" (1 Peter 3:5). They were adorning themselves with the virtues of the Holy Spirit.

3- He could not shave the hair of his head

The second point was that he could not drink wine. Why? The Nazirite should not only avoid getting drunk, but should be even more cautious by not drinking any wine at all. This was symbolic of self-discipline and self-control. He had control over his desires. Another point was that usually people drank wine to celebrate or rejoice. But with the Nazirite, his real rejoicing should be in the Lord. He chose the Lord to be his joy and happiness. The commandment was very precise and clear, not only to avoid drinking wine, but even to the instruction of not eating grapes. He should not touch the grapes, in order not to be tempted by them.

So the Nazirite had to keep three vows: never to touch a dead body, not to shave his hair, and also not to drink wine.

The Lesson

Samson was filled with the Holy Spirit, "*And the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol*" (Judges 13:25). This is a very powerful verse. According to other translations, "*The Spirit of the Lord began moving him,*" which meant that the Spirit of the Lord was directing him, or leading him and helping him to make decisions. He could not take a step in his life without the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

But Samson also had a very weak point in his life which could destroy his entire life, if he were not aware of this particular weak point. Samson's weak point was that he couldn't discipline or subdue his desires towards women.

In the Book of Judges chapter 14, this weak point is explained and reflected upon, "*And Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she pleases me well'*" (Judges 14:3). And because he insisted upon this marriage, his parents agreed, and he married this woman.

This marriage was wrong in the sight of God for three reasons. First, Samson married a foreigner. According to the law of the Old Testament, the children of Israel could not marry from among foreigners. And foreigners here denoted Gentiles, those who did not believe in the God of Israel. So a foreigner also meant a foreigner in faith. For Israel, the foreigner in faith denoted a foreigner in citizenship as well. And the same rule also applied in the New Testament. A marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian was prohibited. Today, we also do not allow marriages between Copts and other denominations for the same reasons. If there are different doctrines and different beliefs, how can one keep the unity of the family? So this doctrine that prohibits marriages between different faiths is not a new one, but an ancient one.

And that is why Samson's parents ask him, "*Is there no woman among the daughters of your people, that you must go to get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?*" (Judges 14:3). His father emphasized the word "uncircumcised," because circumcision was the sign that that person was from God's people. So when his father emphasized the fact that she was the daughter of the uncircumcised Philistines, this meant that they did not worship the God of Israel. Samson being a Nazirite should have known better, but he insisted on getting married to this woman. So this was Samson's first mistake.

What was Samson's second mistake? The decision of marriage was based only on physical attraction. He told his father, "*Get her for me, for she pleases me well*" (Judges 14:3). The decision of marriage was based solely on physical attraction and not on any sort of spiritual grounds. After a few months, within this kind of marriage, the physical attraction may wither and then that person will be faced with the reality of the lacking spirituality. Marriage cannot be simple physical attraction. Marriage is much more complex involving the body, soul and spirit. So you cannot quickly make your decision based only on physical attraction, as Samson said, "*She pleases me well*" (Judges 14:3). This was not a wise or a spiritually made decision.

This brings us to Samson's third mistake. He dishonoured his parents and he didn't listen to them. Samson didn't get the blessing of his parents for this marriage, and he insisted upon his desires. There are many verses in the Old Testament and in the New Testament emphasizing the importance of honouring our parents and obeying them. St. Paul said, "*Honour your father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise*" (Ephesians 6:2).

Sometimes it is very hard to imagine how young men and young women make the decision of marriage without the approval or the blessing of their parents. If we receive the blessings of our parents, all our lives will be blessed.

Samson didn't get the blessings of his father and mother, yet he insisted upon his decision. So his parents yielded to his desire. Many times we force our parents to agree with our decisions, though they are not willing to bless this decision. This was the case with Samson's father and mother.

Although this marriage was not according to the will of God, God who was merciful, transformed the situation into furnishing an opportunity for Samson to defeat the Philistines. For, the Philistines at that time had dominion over Israel.

At a certain point and time; God delivers us to the consequences of our wrong decisions, as He did with Samson at the end. But we will see how many times God defended him, despite of his wrong decisions. A person can make wrong decisions in his life, and God defends him. Abraham lied and said that Sarah was his sister. God defended him. But if the person doesn't learn, once, twice, three, four or even five times, then God will let him be, and he has to bare the consequences of his wrong decisions.

Because of one weak point in his life, Samson started to break his vows. The Holy Bible also says, "*So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah*" (Judges 14:5). As a Nazirite, he should not go to the vineyard at Timnah, because the vineyard had grapes. A Nazirite was not allowed to touch or eat grapes, and Timnah was a city full of vineyards. So he began to break his vows, one after another.

On his way to Timnah he was attacked by a lion... "*And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand*" (Judges 14:6). What was the message that God wanted to give to Samson? He gave Samson the power to tear the lion apart, though he was empty handed. God wanted to teach him a lesson that when the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, he was able to kill a lion. Look at this beautiful expression, "*He had nothing in his hand*" (Judges 14:6). So the lesson to learn here is that if we surrender our spirits to God, God can give us the power to kill the lions in our lives.

Every one of us has a lion in life. This lion could be your temper or your anger. Some people will say 'I can't control my anger'. Maybe that is your lion! For others the lion is drinking, for another the lion is smoking. For others maybe it is Internet addiction, or pornography.

Samson's weakest point was his desires and his lusts. So before he went down to this woman, God allowed him to tear the lion apart. This was to tell him, that he was not weak, and not to say that he could not discipline his desires. Not to say, that he had no control over his soul. No. He most certainly did. 'My Spirit is upon you'. So with the same power that you killed the lion, you could discipline your desires, and your lusts. But he was blind. He didn't understand the lesson. If Samson surrendered his life to the Lord, he could kill the lion in his life (the desire and the lust) which he had difficulty in subduing.

Every Christian should say with St. Paul, "*I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me*" (Philippians 4:13). Not through his power, but through the power of God. This expression "I can't", should disappear from our lives. 'I can't control my anger'. 'I can't stop smoking'. 'I can't stop drinking'. 'I can't stop watching TV.' This word 'I can't' means that person is weak. This means that person can't use the Holy Spirit that is within him. Samson didn't use the Spirit that was moving him, to subdue his desire. This is why at the end Samson was destroyed.

Samson followed through with his marriage regardless and whilst at the wedding he put together a riddle by which he could win some clothes from his guests. However, his wife...this woman he desired, deceived him, for she gave the answer of his riddle to the Philistines after they threatened to burn her and her father. "*That he told her all his heart*" (Judges 16:17). What she should have done is told her husband of the situation.

So after that, rather than making the right decision, to leave her, and say this marriage was not according to God's will, Samson gave her the answer she sought because she pressed him. And again God didn't leave him, as we read in verse 19, "*Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men*" (Judges 14:19).

Then Samson feeling betrayed by his wife left her and went his way, and on the way home saw the lion he had killed and saw that bees had created a hive in the carcass. So Samson took some of the honeycomb and gave it to his parents, however he did not tell them that it came from a dead body (ie unclean). Therefore Samson broke the second rule of a Nazarite and touched something unclean.

His desire for his wife returned to him quickly and even after her betrayal he still wanted her back so he went to his father in law to get her back. Then his father-in-law told him his "... *wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man*" (Judges 14:20).. "*I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion*" (Judges 15:2). Samson failed in his marriage, due to three mistakes:

- 1- He didn't take the blessings of his parents
- 2- He based his decision on physical attraction
- 3- He married a foreigner of foreign faith.

Samson after he found out what the father in law had done, wanted revenge against the Philistines. So he went out and set their crops on fire. Then the philistines got extremely angry and when they found out why he had done this they went out and burned his wife and her father. God gave Samson one opportunity after another to repent, and to learn how to discipline his desires.

In verse 18, we read for the first time about Samson praying, "*Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the Lord*" (Judges 15:18). Samson cried to the Lord because he was thirsty, a physical need. He didn't cry when she pressed him. He didn't cry to the Lord when he was making the decision of marriage. He only cried when he was thirsty, "*You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised*" (Judges 15:18). Again God was merciful to Samson, and gave him water to drink.

Did Samson learn his lesson? No. The Holy Bible says, "*Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there*" (Judges 16:1). This was the second woman in his life. "*And he went in to her*" (Judges 16:1). Again this was Samson's weakest point. He should have developed power over it. But he refused to cry to the Lord to deliver him, not from thirst, but from his desires. Samson, who was so strong, and so mighty, was so weak before women. This weakness came from within him. This weakness came from his desires. Again the Philistines knew that he was laying with this woman, the harlot, and wanted to kill him. But God, who is good, once more delivered him, giving him another chance.

Then the third woman appeared in his life, as we read in verse 4, "*Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah*" (Judges 16:4). You will discover that he lied to her several times. And whatever he told her, she passed on to the Philistines. But they couldn't over power Samson. Samson, more than once, knew that Delilah was taking his secrets and giving them to his enemy to kill him. Despite this, he insisted to live with her. You know the saying, 'Love is blind', and this was true in Samson's situation. Here 'Love' was desire. When a person is enslaved in his lust and his desire, he becomes blind, and Samson was indeed blind.

The story of Samson continues until this day. Young boys and girls live together. This is wrong, for it is destroying their lives exactly like Samson. Then God said, if I protect him again, Samson might lose his eternal life. It is better for Samson, to suffer the consequences of his wrong decisions. I protected him several times, but now I care more for his eternal life. So the Lord said who would awaken him? Samson must be confronted with his behaviour to know that what he is doing is wrong.

Again what happened with his first wife, happened with Delilah. "*Then she said to him, 'How can you say, I love you', when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me three times, and have not told me where your great strength lies*" (Judges 16:15). Wake up Samson, now your soul is vexed to death. Leave her. But instead of making the right decision to leave her, what did he do? He told her about his hair. He became so upset, that he wished to die. "*So that his soul was vexed to death*" (Judges 16:16). Instead of leaving her, what did he do? He told her everything. And Delilah knew very well his weakest point.

Now there was a problem. She knew the secret of his strength. She knew that when his hair was shaved, he would lose his power. The Holy Bible explains in verse 18, "*When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart! So the lords of Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand*" (Judges 16:18). She extensively thought about the most vulnerable situation in which she would be able to lull him. She thought that Samson would be very weak when he lay on her knees, because that was his weakest point. So she set up the scene and called a man to shave his head. "*Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him*" (Judges 16:18). He had lived with her and told her all his heart, and she was the first one to torment him.

This is the tormenting of the sin. The sin that we sometimes love, and prefer over our God, it is the first to torment us. She started to torment him, and his power departed from him. "*Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes*" (Judges 16:21). Sin blinds. As previously mentioned, Samson was spiritually blind. Now his physical blindness is an affirmation of his spiritual blindness. If he were not spiritually blind, he wouldn't have become physically blind. His desires had controlled him. His desires prevented him from seeing what she was doing. Sin made Samson blind.

The second point was that they bound him with bronze fitters. But before they bound him, he was bound by his desires. Before he was physically bound, his desires and lusts bound him. Sin doesn't only blind a person but also makes him lose his freedom. He was a slave to sin. He went to the woman in Timnah. He saw the adulterous woman, and he went to her, and he went to Delilah. He was bound. This powerful and great man was in

bondage and a slave to sin. The blindness of his heart resulted in his physical blindness; also the bondage of his hands was a result of his spiritual bondage in sin.

And he became a grinder in the prison, living in a vicious circle. His desires and lusts controlled him, for he was going from one woman to another looking for satisfaction in vain (living in a vicious circle). He should allow his spirit, led by the Spirit of God, to control him.

They also mocked Samson. *"So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, 'Call for Samson, that he may perform for us'. So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars"* (Judges 16:25). The people were sitting, about 3,000 men and women watching him playing and performing. Samson prays for the second time, but this prayer was a prayer of repentance. It was a prayer of awakening. He was alert to his weakest point.

"Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there - about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed" (Judges 16:27). And God accepted his repentance, answered his prayer and gave him the power. In the Holy Book of Hebrew chapter 11, St. Paul said that Samson was a man of God, *"And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to fight the armies of aliens"* (Hebrew 11:32-34).

Samson was a very strong person, but he had one weak point. This weakness made him blind and bound and also made his life empty (grinding in prison living in a vicious circle). We all need to examine and to search ourselves to determine our weakest point, because sometimes our weakest point is our lion. Weakest point means that I am weak before it, or before this sin, and that is why this sin is like a lion to me. But remember that God helped Samson to tear the lion apart. So God can set us free from our lions, if we surrender ourselves to Him. And if we pray as Samson prayed, *"O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!"* (Judges 16:28).

God is willing to give us strength. God is willing to help us to kill the lion in our lives. But He will not do this unless we call upon His Holy Name, and ask Him to help us. So before we suffer the dire consequences of our sins, let us try to eliminate these lions. If Samson had listened to the different lessons that God tried to teach him, if he would have opened his eyes to God's messages, he wouldn't have had to suffer so. God was very compassionate with Samson, just for him to awake. At the end when he chose not to wake up, God had no choice but to submit him to his enemies, to save his soul.

May God give us all the strength to slaughter our lions through the prayers of Samson the Strong and all His holy and faithful Saints. Glory belongs to God forever. Amen.

H.G. Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Class Discussion

Distribute this scenario to the teens and let them discuss the results and consequences in groups and report back.

“John (Joanne for the girls) is growing up in a Christian family a church goer. He/she sometimes feels that the relation with God is a burden on his freedom. He/she would imagine that he is better off without all these restrictions in the bible and the church. He/she is in the advanced classes of Yr 10. Zenab/Mohammed is in the same class, beautiful/handsome, warm and attractive. He/She is religious Muslim girl/Boy. Her father is a leader in the Muslim community. According to Zenab/Mohammed’s religion if she/he converts a Christian to Islam she will have a great house in heaven. John/Joanne was attracted to Zenab/Mohammed and she/she encouraged him/her. The relationship between them built up daily, studying together in the school, telephone calls, msm, etc

One day his/her parents were aware of his situation, shocked, very angrily and asked him/her firmly to stop this relation immediately, or else...

John/Joanne is also very angry about the attitude of his/her parents and accused them of being ‘old fashion’.

You are a sincere friend of John/Joanne. How do you advise him and why?

Lesson:

1. Use the life of Samson as the first step and follow it by reading of the following parts of the book of Judges ch13:2-5, 24-25; 14:1-3, 5-6, 15-17; 16:1, 4-6; 16:15-21. If the time is not enough read some of the verses. And highlight the main parts of the story of Samson (It is assumed that the teens knew the story before, if not please explore the story first.

Practical exercise:

Work through this week on one of you uncontrolled desire:

- Pray for it – ask forgiveness and strength to overcome it.
- Confess it to your father of confession.
- Wait for the victory.

Questions:

1. Complete the sentence with correct word or phrase:
 - Samson considered as a ----- for the people of Israel.

Prophet, king, judge

- Samson' mother was ordered by the angel not to drink ----- or to eat -----

Water, wine ,milk, Meat, vegetables, unclean food

2. Why was Manoh (Samson's father) not happy about the 1st wife of his son?
"refer to Judges 1:1-3"

3. What was the main problem in the life of Samson? Give evidence?

4. What was the main contradiction in the life of Samson?

5. Check the following desires in the life of Samson and identify if they are acceptable or not?

- The desire to be married
- The desire to marry a philistine woman
- The desire to marry a woman because she pleased him
- The desire to go to a harlot as he saw her.
- The desire to love Delilah, regardless if he knew that she would deliver him to his enemies.
- The desire to ask the Lord to strengthen him
- The desire to overcome his enemies.

6. When a Christian person is consecrated to be a ("Nazerite" to the Lord does he have any stamp indicating this? What are the rules of the "Christian Nazerite"

7. When we are facing an unacceptable desires there are 2 forces working inside us:

- What are these 2 forces?
- How do we win the battle?
- If you were Samson what you would do?
- If you dragged half way to fulfilling a desire. Do you think it is possible to overcome it, and how?

8. What was the sad reward of the sin of Samson? Do you think this will always be the case? Did you think that he repented at last? Why?